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ABSTRACT

This paper describes Oregon's experiences with state performance requirements. It explains that these requirements cover three areas: budgeting on a program basis, providing a schooling environment designed to meet student needs through a systematic management process, and setting learning performance standards for students, including graduation requirements. The seven-year progress of the Oregon experience with these state requirements is briefly described, stretching from the early goal-setting phases in 1969 through the implementation years of 1973-1976, up to the period of renewal in 1978. The paper lists several policy issues that had to be determined to put the program into operation, including choosing common term definitions and incentives. The tensions between the local role and the state role in setting performance goals and learning objectives are examined. The paper describes the emergence of the state support system for the Oregon program. This system, headed by the Oregon Department of Education, includes policy-making, provision of information resources and communications links, and personnel development. Finally, recommendations regarding the institution of such a program of state requirements are offered. (JM)

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STATE-WIDE LEARNING REQUIREMENTS: THE OREGON STORY

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I. INTRODUCTION

The ten-year plan to improve the effectiveness of local schools in meeting the needs of Oregon's children and youth is in its seventh year and continuing.

In spite of the changing leadership of three state superintendents and a complete turnover in the membership of the state board of education, the commitment to increase educational quality in the state by improving the capacity of the schools to manage programs and program improvement has not diminished, even with the prospect of years added to that timeline before attaining significant benefits with the system in place. The pressure and frustrations that have faced the educational community in recent years all across the nation have stimulated this long-term commitment.

Educational quality in Oregon was traditionally evaluated in terms of the input to the system. Evaluative criteria for schools addressed such issues as pupil-teacher ratios, books in the library, and acres on a school site. Such an approach to evaluation measured the performance of the system in providing resources, not the performance of the system in reaching its goals. The underlying assumption has been that the more resources, the better the quality. The focus of evaluative criteria appears to be changing. The shift seems directed toward the quality of results.

Those representing educational agencies and institutions are now being asked to be clear, concise and public about their promises and the degree to which they are being met. Though a recent demand in Oregon, accountability in the schools is being directed toward (1) the relation of the school system in the community, (2) the effectiveness of programs within the system in terms of factors such as achievement, costs and certain human concerns, and (3) the relationship between the system and the individual student. Any such accountability plan must address the criterion problem. It must answer the question, "What is the acceptable performance to which we can agree?" Goals and standards provide the criteria which establish the acceptable level of quality in measured performance.

Goals which describe learning outcomes drive the management (i.e.,planning, operating, controlling, and evaluating) of instructional programs whether at student or

program levels. They serve as the basis for developing both curriculum and assessment.

Oregon's plan which is designed to assure the effectiveness of local programs in serving student needs covers three areas of emphasis, (1) learning, (2) the local program, and (3) a state support system. In each case, plans have been established for the management of resources to achieve planned outcomes. The first of the three is an emphasis on learning. Significant attention must be given to what we know about learning and how we facilitate it. Not only that, but priority attention must be given to how effective each learner in the system has become in terms of state, district and personal goals. As time goes by, we are increasingly convinced that every decision and action with regard to each area of the state system must be planned and completed with these considerations in mind.

The second area of emphasis is on the local program. The opportunity to bring learners, curriculum and teachers together within a school environment is accomplished through programs such as math, health, science, etc. as school resources and activities are organized to reach the goals set for learners. If the mission of the local system is to provide educational opportunity to learners through its various programs and if the state is responsible for assuring the effectiveness of those programs, then the state must take steps to enhance program management and program improvement.

The third area of emphasis is upon the kind of state-wide system which enables the resources of the state to be effectively used in providing support to local programs in meeting the kinds of expectations which the state might set. Those resources which are under the control of state and regional agencies, professional associations, institutions of higher education and research and development organizations must be targeted and coordinated in such a way as to increase the opportunities for success of the local programs to be served, including the student and professional personnel involved.

In examining Oregon's policy shift, we will share the state requirements for learning, our experience to date in establishing, developing and implementing those requirements, a description of the emerging state support system and a set of tentative observations about our experiences as part of this progress report.

II. REQUIREMENTS FOR LEARNING

Recent state policies have established performance requirements for school systems, for instructional programs and for locally defined student outcomes. The plan has been designed around three policies established by the State Board of Education. The first requirement calls upon local systems to budget and account for fiscal resources on a program basis. The program classification structure established an organization and nomenclature for instructional and support programs in the state.

The second policy is a curriculum requirement calling upon local school districts to provide, through a systematic management process, a schooling environment which establishes instructional plans designed to meet student needs. These process requirements have been established for managing school systems, instructional programs and individual student diagnosis and prescription. These have been developed around a generic system of goals development, assessment, needs identification and program improvement.

The third policy is an assessment requirement calling upon the local district to establish standards of performance for a set of outcome statements designed to demonstrate whether students completing school can apply knowledge, skill and understandings gained in school in real life situations commonly experienced after leaving school. In other words, the school will assess whether the young person is ready to take the next step beyond schooling, at least at a minimal level.

These last two policies have been reflected in the revised minimum state standards. A great deal of attention has been given to one dimension of those standards, the graduation requirements. Oregon's graduating students in 1978 were among the first in the nation to be certified for their diplomas--not only on the basis of the old attendance and credit requirements--but also on the basis of an assessment of a minimal level of performance in the selected competency areas of reading, writing, speaking, listening, analyzing and computing. The program, adopted in 1972, will not be fully implemented until the class of 1981. At that time, competency will be demonstrated in certain citizenship, health, consumer and career areas over and above those required for this past year's senior class.

During implementation of the minimum standards, numerous technical problems have been addressed, and for the most part they have been conquered, even though some answers have arrived five years too late.

III. THE OREGON EXPERIENCE

At this time, the Oregon experience has progressed through at least four phases, perhaps there will be others. The four phases include:

1. The Mission (1969-1974)
2. Implementation (1973-1976)
3. Anxiety (1977, 1978)
4. Renewal (1978- to date)

These stages of development may be useful in reviewing and understanding the philosophical, policy, conceptual, political and technical issues which have affected state and local responsibilities and responses.

The Mission

The first phase covering the period from 1969 to 1974, was a period of setting goals, identifying needs and setting priorities.

After the decade of the 50's with its emphasis on growth and assurance of adequate resources with which to work as the measure of quality, and after the decade of the 60's with the search for quality directed towards innovation of educational processes, the 70's began with an emphasis on the product of the system. The consumer, accountability, back to basics and competency movements have all been manifestations of the concern of professionals and patrons about monitoring the effectiveness of individual students and the system itself in terms of results.

At least four broad goals emerged during this early stage, (1) that each student would be more productive, (2) that the curriculum would be more relevant, (3) that local programs would be more effective, and (4) that students, educators and patrons would develop greater commitment and investment in the educational system.

The early agreements reached about the proposed changes were clear about the need for a greater use of what was known about management and its application

system. Whether management by objectives, program, planning, budgeting and evaluation systems, systems theory or other emerging concepts were to have utility in this renewal effort was not challenged by the educational leadership of the state. What was not known, however, was how the technologies might be applied in such a way as to respect local initiative yet bring the entire state along toward that "... uniform and general system of common schools" prescribed by the Oregon Constitution.

At least six policy issues were examined in reaching the agreements necessary to move through the first phase.

1. Leadership. The decision about whether the state legislature or the state board would take the leadership role was neither sudden nor deliberate. Over a two-year period, the state board parlayed the Title III, ESEA, needs assessment requirement into a series of town-hall meetings in which Oregonians spoke out about needs and concerns. Among the concerns were that students leaving school were often unable to cope at the basic level, and that school programs seemed ineffective in doing anything about it.

   In order to design a plan for renewing school systems, the board searched for a point of intervention which would trigger change throughout the system. After determining that current school requirements did not reflect a demonstration of student performance, a competency requirement was added to the existing credit and attendance requirements used to certify that a student was ready to graduate from high school.

   The 1972 legislative interim committee began the first of several legislative attempts to define basic education. The bills introduced by that committee in the 1973 sessions included the establishment of statewide goals, a set of twenty-two competency statements and an accountability system

for local school systems. Testimony from the Department of Education appealed for noninvolvement by the legislature body to give the state board's rules time to take effect. All related bills failed.

Though implementation through administrative rules has enabled the state board to periodically modify the system to reflect the state of the art in our technology as well as the capacity of local districts to respond, locking the legislature out has had the effect of making it "your" system rather than "ours" with few resources and little sympathy provided for the problems we've experienced.

In 1974, the Board adopted state goals for learners and added to its rules (the minimum state standards) the requirements that districts begin to formalize program evaluation as well as to assure individual student diagnosis and prescription.

The state goals for learners declared the scope of what students should know and be able to do in assuming the life roles of learner, individual, citizen, consumer, producer and family member. They have played an important role in getting schools to examine their programs not only in terms of what we've always taught in school, but what will be faced in the life's experience beyond formal schooling. It has been difficult, however, to make a clear audit trail to local programs and their goals.

The program evaluation rules included the requirement to publicly declare goals for all programs, assess student achievement in selected programs, identify needs based on assessment results, and plan improvements around those needs.

2. Initial focus. The board wanted to respond to these basic questions: What are students to learn? what are they learning? are they improving? what will we do to improve programs?

The initial point of intervention selected by the Board, therefore, was to focus on the competency requirement. Extensive debate raged over the original draft of the requirements which included a state list. Local educators pressed the state board to leave competency definitions, standards verification and certification to the local level. The Board agreed to delegate the responsibility based upon the position that a single best set was not known, and, in fact, the decisions should reflect local views as a way of obtaining greater commitment and effort at the local level.

3. Definition. Definition and content have been critical issues in our experience. As long as we consider deriving educational purpose, curriculum, instruction and assessment criteria from competencies, we must be clear not only about their purpose and intended use, but about their content as well.

   The national debate has ranged over basic skills, school subjects, life areas, basic skills applied in school subjects and basic skills applied in life areas. Many believe that a generic definition of competency requires a separation between the acquisition of knowledge and skills and the application of life-role functions.

   Confusion has occurred in Oregon because, though early examples were provided and the rules were written to reflect the application made, the general definition in the rules set a pattern for many that has been difficult to modify even with a more precise definition.

4. Incentives. The search for an implementation strategy led the Board to examine whether impelling or motivational incentives should be used. The decision fell somewhere in between two extremes. The Board adopted the rules as part of the minimum state standards by which local systems are evaluated as the basis for receiving state funds, yet major design and planning responsibilities were delegated to the local level.

In addition, the Board agreed not to set the plan in concrete, but to periodically evaluate and revise it as needed.

The carrot and stick approach has worked reasonably well as districts have accepted the value of keeping the pressure on as well as having flexibility for locally designed systems with an opportunity for individual district waivers if a district could not meet the timelines. In addition, the openness and responsiveness of the Board to needed changes has been appreciated at all levels.

5. Timing. Another major issue was whether the policy demands embodied in the rules should be laid on all schools effective at some distant date even though little or no development work had been completed, or whether pilot projects ought to be established to design and develop prototypes before requirements were established.

The decision was made to set the demand and, though providing some state development work, local systems were given the responsibility for design and development while under the pressure of a deadline.

6. Design Responsibility. The state delegated the responsibility of designing and developing local plans for implementation which were to serve as the basis for state evaluation.

Excellent work has been completed by local systems and the commitment to those local plans has been significant where real efforts have been made. A better balance of local and state activity would have reduced the slippage and missteps many districts have taken. Extensive criticism has been expressed about the excessive drain on time and energy of staff.

Implementation (1973-1977)

The years from 1973 to 1977 covered a period of design, development and testing. Many local systems jumped into the work with state-sponsored efforts, while others plunged fully into local activity. Many, however, seemed to believe that the whole thing would go away, or that someone would do it for them.

Several groups of local school systems joined in a series of pilot projects to generate sample policies and practices which, when synthesized, were translated into the first of several guidelines published over the years. Though the work generated was thoughtfully done and much of it has utility even today, several mistakes were made which paved the way for future confusion.

The best development work, however, proved to be the work done at the local level or in consortiums which emerged. Only one or two teacher training institutions stepped in to provide the kind of assistance and training that was needed.

Publications, training materials, training and technical assistance were provided annually on a state-wide, regional and local basis by the Department of Education, yet it never seemed to be enough.

Bright spots were beginning to emerge among the schools and districts which accepted the challenge.

Anxiety (1977-78)

The 1977-78 school year was an anxious period for students, teachers and many parents. No one could anticipate the real effects of the new graduation requirements. Would fewer students graduate? Would teachers be liable when students were unable to perform after leaving the system?

The anxieties felt and for the most part resolved by superintendents, curriculum directors and principals during the early years, finally arrived at the teacher level. As a result of teacher anxiety, students and parents in turn became anxious. For the most part, concern centered around the competency requirement rather than the other policy requirements.

A joint boards' task force was established by the State Board of Education, The Board of Higher Education and the Education Coordinating Commission to examine implementation progress and to provide a mid-term report on the long-term effort. The following perceived problems were spelled out in the report:

1. Excessive variations of local responses inhibit communication and transfers among systems.
2. Excessive emphasis is placed on minimums.
3. Competency definition is unclear and leads to wide disparity among districts as to content and numbers of competencies.
4. Local options on policies for certification, waivers, etc. lead to charges of unfair practice among neighboring districts.
5. Implementation is fragmented.

An interim legislative task force was established in 1977 to review the requirements as a result of negative testimony from teachers before the Senate Education Committee during the 1977 session. The task force recommendations included:

1. Give attention to the identification and correction of deficiencies at the elementary level.
2. Delay the remaining competency requirements for the Class of 1981 until present requirements are more effectively implemented.
3. If continued, the competency requirements should be regarded only as a floor to educational achievement.
4. The competency requirements should be emphasized at elementary and junior high levels.

Every effort should be made to bring more uniformity to the competency requirements.

6. Establish an evaluation plan which examines the effects on students, staffing patterns, costs, implementation problems and student-related problems.

Though numerous problems were perceived and solutions were proposed, most of the problems seemed to reflect not the policies themselves, but the methods and means chosen to implement them. Local systems with good communication and involvement of staff and patrons seemed to have a few problems.

Many began to see the potential payoffs of the system. The Legislative Task Force supported the potential of competency-based education in spite of concerns raised. One interesting bit of testimony heard by the task force from a staff member of a district which had taken a negative posture on the requirements, was that, in fact, fewer students were falling through the cracks and that parents and students were now facing student deficiencies.

The Oregon Competency-Based Education Project, administered by the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, found through a survey that something different seems to be happening in the classroom. Over 90 percent of the districts responding stated that students, in general, will increase their achievement in the basic skills of reading, writing, and computing. More than 80 percent said that student learning will be of more immediate use than has been true in the past. Nearly 70 percent of the respondents stated that: (a) students will have an increased opportunity to select courses of their own choice; (b) students will more often work at a pace that is best for them; and (c) student learning programs will more often be designed for their individual needs.

The most dramatic evidence about the potentially positive effects of the new requirements is found in how students spend their time. In over 90 percent of the schools surveyed, it was estimated that students will likely be spending more time: (a) talking to teachers or counselors to select courses; and (b) working on basic skills areas of reading, writing, and computation. More than 70 percent said that students will likely spend more time in learning settings outside the classroom and in relatively active pursuits such as writing, speaking, and demonstrating skills.

Community involvement in the design of new school programs also was clearly evident. Over 60 percent of the respondents stated that community representatives participated in setting district goals. In schools where community involvement was sought, over 95 percent reported the involvement as helpful.

It appears that parents in districts where progress has been made like the new standards because they feel a sense of understanding of what the schools are about, a sense of control in being able to make recommendations for changes, and an ability to understand what it is the schools are trying to help their students to learn and to become.

In addition, general comments from the field suggested that early payoffs included the increased attention given to curriculum development, greater agreement on goals by the community and school, greater attention and success with the basic skills, increased willingness to share resources and increased communication with the local community.

It is interesting to note that while most of the attention was given to the competency requirement, the local systems were gradually implementing the other management requirements as scheduled without much fanfare.

Renewal (1978-)

The final sounds of the graduation parties had hardly ended, when the pressure seemed to ease off. A sense of relief was obvious. Responses tended to be, "We did it." "It can work." "Let's attack the problems."

Local systems are now streamlining their systems. The state is presently calling for input on the rules to correct obvious deficiencies. A number of critical policy issues are still unresolved.

Some want the state to play a heavier role in defining competencies and the basic curriculum. Others want the state to allow local systems a chance to implement their plans.

One of the significant highlights of this period has been the efforts to build a state support system. A loosely-coupled system using the resources of the state to support local systems as they seek to cope with the new requirements.

IV. EMERGENCE OF THE STATE SUPPORT SYSTEM

The Department of Education has three broad functions: (1) to provide leadership. This is accomplished through the establishment of criteria, goals, rules, policies, incentives, etc., (2) to ensure compliance. This is a necessary quality assurance function for state and federal programs, rules, statutes, etc., and (3) to provide support. This is accomplished by providing information and technical assistance through documents, models, people, training, etc.

The development of the support system is obviously important if local systems are to cope with the new demands. Development of the system has been based on at least four assumptions.

1. Support will focus on local program management and improvement.
2. The model for local program management and improvement used to identify, understand and organize the local support needs is goal-based, competency-based, data influenced and serves problem sensing and problem solving.
3. All state support commitment, activity and improvement, can be coordinated among state and regional agencies, organizations and associations.
4. The state education agency has a unique role in leading and managing the state support system.

At least seven parts of the support system must be examined. These parts are neither exhaustive of the activity in the state, nor mutually exclusive, nor equally developed as the state system is emerging. The parts include:

1. State intents
2. Policy incentives
3. Informed policymaking
4. Information resources
5. Communications
6. Development
7. Personnel development

State Intents

In 1974, the State Board adopted a set of goals for learners which were not cast in the form of subjects, programs or disciplines to be mastered, but rather they were cast in terms of the life roles individuals must play not only during the years of formal schooling, but beyond the schooling years as well. The goals were written around the life roles of the learner, individual, citizen, consumer, producer and family member. This policy has served as the cornerstone of a structure in which local systems are expected to be responsible not only for student effectiveness in school and with a school-based curriculum, but in life as well. In essence, the school is asked, at a minimum, to assure that each student is ready to cope in a functional way beyond the school experience. The state support system must keep these intents clearly in focus.

Policy Incentives

The State Board has given policy direction in the state through several policy incentives. The Board's priorities (long-range objectives) have been established in such areas as improving opportunities for the linguistically and culturally different student and for the handicapped, improving program effectiveness in local systems, and improving the achievements and programs in the basic skills. These priorities are explicated through formally adopted planning statements which define the current condition, the problem(s) to be solved, the objectives of the Board and its plan of action. An important piece of that plan is the determination of the extent that minimum state standards will be modified by the Board as an impelling incentive to bring about change and improvement in school programs. Those standards serve as the basis for the state accreditation and for distribution of state funds.

Informed Policymaking

Every effort has been made to be certain these policies have been developed by an informed Board. The agency has been improving the board's planning system by designing it around the same technology asked of local systems for planning and evaluation. The statewide goals, assessments, priorities and plans are enabling the Board to solve problems within a data and needs base.

For example, the assessment of reading, writing and computing at grades four, seven and eleven has proven useful in setting certain policy, curriculum, instruction and support plans. In addition, the plan for evaluating the minimum standards and graduation requirements, as well as their local implementation will prove useful for quality control of the state support system as well as for the quality-assurance responsibilities that state board members and legislators have for whether local programs are improving in terms of state criteria.

Information Resources

It is not enough just to be clear about the policies of the state. The state must establish an information resource base which can be available at local, regional and state levels. The information resources system enables local systems to have information provided which is based upon their informational needs. The information may be delivered in the form of documents (publications, reports, training modules, etc.), models and demonstration centers and depositories such as the goals bank, competency bank, test-item bank and promising practices catalogs. Also included are the specialists who manage the various Department support programs in language arts, reading, mathematics, etc., and who provide brokerage services between users and the information or the providers of it.

Two very important information resources outside the agency are described here to illustrate the concepts that have been important in developing a state sytem. Over a ten-year period the Tri-County Goals Project has established fourteen goals' catalogs which provide sample program goals, a taxonomy of content and sample course goals with coding for knowledge and process and grade level. Efforts are being made to computerize the collection to facilitate its improvement and be more responsive to local needs. The test-item bank has been developed under the direction of the Northwest Evaluation Association in the areas of reading, language arts and basic mathematics. The items are Rasch calibrated and computerized to enhance responsiveness to local needs. In each of these cases, the state agency has provided resources and assistance in their development and is presently designing means for decentralizing access to local and regional users.

Communication

Communication systems in any state are difficult to establish because they often compete with informal networks. We have found it useful to utilize the natural structure of local, intermediate, and state organizations. We are trying to provide incentives for building regional capacities for needs sensing, information resource building and the delivery of information and training. We have encouraged the development of regional cooperatives of local and intermediate districts and teacher training institutions. Cadre have been identified in many programs to tie the state with intermediate and local needs. Linker training has enabled linkers and cadre members to begin to link up resources at all levels. In addition, the Department of Education has adapted to the new demands for support by establishing a Center for Program Coordination to coordinate dissemination and development activities in the agency. Agency-wide steering committees have been useful in tying units together to address common problems.

Development

Development is conducted to improve the quality of information in the information resources base. We are trying to assure that development is consistent with the needs of the users as well as the state model for local program management and improvement. Basic state department development activity is now being organized around the elements of the state model as defined in the minimum state standards. In addition, it is scheduled on a six-year cycle which matches the state textbook adoption cycle. Development activity, whether basic development or implementation of development, which is funded by the state and conducted by local agencies, is expected to be consistent with and supportive of the state model for program management and improvement.

Personnel Development

The continuing personnel development of professional educators in the state has been the subject of intensive study during the past three years. A profession-wide study group representing state agencies and statewide professional associations representing teacher trainers, administrators, teachers and local board members conducted research to identify the needs and problems inhibiting effective development of personnel.

The result of the study has been a general set of policies and procedures which have now been accepted by all those involved. Central to the plan is the formation of an "Interagency Council on Continuing Professional Development." The council will monitor statewide activity and facilitate communication and coordination among the various parties.

The state agency has begun to refine its systems and procedures as part of a four-state project funded by the Office of Education. One of the benefits has been to recognize the three parts of the statewide plan. They include the advanced certification component, the individual professional component and the staff development/program improvement component. The linkage between staff development and program improvement has been important in bringing clarity within the dissemination and development activities related to instructional programs. It has also been helpful in the design, development and implementation of the local program management and improvement model as well as the state support system.

V. OBSERVATIONS

The following observations are presented for consideration. They are tentative in the sense that any system is far from operational and much is to be done as well as to be learned from the experience.

1. Careful development plans need to be established before policies are established.
2. The state legislature must have an opportunity to be informed and to provide support.
3. The policy demands should be kept in administrative rules rather than statute in order to facilitate improvements through periodic reviews.
4. Assurance must be provided for local initiative .
5. A well defined evaluation plan must be established.
6. Sample policies, procedures and practices for each requirement must be provided, yet room must be left for local choice and adaption.
7. A broad base of support must be obtained.
8. Be careful of the balance between stress upon the system as a stimulant and frustration caused by lack of clarity or inablity to accomplish the assignment.
9. State-level activity needs to be organized in support of local needs.
10. Local systems should be encouraged to borrow and share effective practices.
11. Volunteerism should be encouraged as a means of building common spirit of sharing and supporting local efforts.

The Oregon approach to the improvement of learning is part of a set of solutions to long-range and complex problems which must be solved. The development of local programs which are managed and improved to assure the improvement of effectiveness is central to those solutions. A state support system can have utility and be effective only if is designed to be responsive to the needs of local users as they seek to meet local and state demands.

We believe a total system view which includes plans for improving its various elements will join with the priority attention given to improved learning to improve the effectiveness of instruction programs as the basis for providing opportunity and success for the children and youth attending Oregon's schools.